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ABSTRACT

A study examined the impact of the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) Dropout Prevention Program on teachers and the implications of the program for professional development. Kindergarten through high-school classroom teachers designed their own projects, applied for grants, controlled project budgets, directed implementation, and evaluated the outcomes. Data came from interviews with participating teachers and NFIE staff, a retrospective survey of 57 teachers who directed projects during 1986-1991, case studies of 4 representative projects, Dropout Prevention project evaluations and annual reports, and student outcomes collected by projects funded in school years 1991-92 and 1992-93. Teachers said they improved their leadership abilities; improved their teaching of at-risk children; developed their collaboration, teamwork, and networking skills; and gained skill in proposal writing. Of the projects funded during 1991 through 1993 that documented a standard set of student outcome variables, the majority reported improvements in attendance, behavior, grades, promotion/retention rates, and test scores. Dropout Prevention projects often produced a ripple effect beyond the immediate circle of participating teachers and students. The Dropout Prevention program experience highlights issues that others might consider in formulating their own policies for professional development and school reform, including teacher-directed grants, new teacher roles, site-based management, systemwide reforms, teacher time, and children at risk of school failure. The program experience also suggests roles for state and local National Education Association affiliates to play in supporting professional development programs focused in children at risk of school failure. (Contains 24 references. An appendix presents information on data sources and 12 figures of data.) (RS)

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DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAM

OF THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION

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The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) was established in 1969 by the National Education Association. NFIE provides teachers, education support personnel, and higher education faculty and staff with opportunities and resources to respond effectively to the needs of students in a society that is increasingly culturally diverse, globally interdependent, and reliant on rapidly changing technologies. The Foundation also works with educators in exploring and testing innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Finally, NFIE promotes changes in education policy in ways that support the continual improvement of the nation's educational workforce and the ability of all students to meet high standards and achieve academic success.

NFIE's work is anchored by a firm conviction that all young people must be provided with the resources necessary to achieve educational excellence and that the most meaningful and lasting educational reform begins with the empowerment and professional development of those who work and interact with students on a daily basis.

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1 Executive Summary

The Dropout Prevention Program, now in its final year, is one of several initiatives supported by the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) to test NFIE's belief that investing in the development of teachers is the key to improving education. This program provided grants—along with an array of support strategies—to public school teachers to implement projects of their own design aimed at encouraging success among students at risk of school failure. From 1986 to 1994, the program awarded over $2 million for 103 projects in 30 states.

The Dropout Prevention Program illustrates ways to invest in teachers that result in using minds well—teachers' own, students', parents', as well as community members'. The payoff is an increase in the kinds of experiences that contribute to success among students who are most at risk of school failure.

The NFIE Dropout Prevention Program experience shows the positive effects of a professional development strategy determined and led by teachers. The program gave an unusual degree of authority to teachers. Classroom teachers designed their own projects, applied for grants, controlled project budgets, directed implementation, and evaluated the outcomes. Another key charac-

teristic of the program was its commitment to providing teachers with comprehensive support strategies through ongoing technical assistance, consultation, capacity-building workshops, and mentoring by experienced NFIE teacher-grantees.

IMPACT OF PROGRAM ON TEACHERS

Evidence from an NFIE survey of participating teachers, annual project evaluations and reports, case studies, and teacher interviews indicates that the Dropout Prevention Program had several positive effects on teachers.

- **Creative ideas.** NFIE grants were a catalyst for teachers to conceive and put into practice a range of fresh approaches for helping students at risk of school failure. Projects were as diverse as a student-run business involving Hawaiian taro cultivation and fish farming, a hands-on science program involving university professors, a project engaging students in community volunteerism, and a parent-child computer learning project.

- **Leadership abilities.** Teachers said that the grants helped develop their leadership skills. Three-quarters of the project directors surveyed said that their ability to influence others had changed considerably as a result of the project. Sixty-five percent reported that their risk-taking behavior increased. A majority noted that they had greatly increased their involvement in program planning, curriculum shaping, and professional development. In addition, many reported taking on new leadership roles in professional organizations, on committees, in education policy development, or in education reform initiatives.

- **New knowledge and skills.** Participating teachers gained knowledge and understanding about effective ways to teach children at risk of school failure. Surveyed teachers cited other pedagogical areas in which the NFIE project had increased their competencies: curriculum improvement (77 percent), school organization (58 percent), school change (71 percent), and instructional planning (71 percent). Other areas in which teachers reported enhanced knowledge were evaluation, parent involvement, educational technology, and communication skills.

- **Collaboration.** Surveyed teachers strongly agreed that the Dropout Prevention Program helped them develop valuable collaboration, teamwork, and networking skills, from which they gained new knowledge and mutual support. Some projects were designed as team efforts; others that began as individual endeavors quickly evolved to encompass teams of teachers. Sixty-seven percent said that they had developed considerable skill in building coalitions as a result of the grant, and 77 percent said that they were better able to influence others as a result of extended networks acquired through

the project. Project directors reported that as a result of the project, they had increased their interaction with teaching colleagues (74 percent), administrators (68 percent), parents (58 percent), community members (56 percent), and teachers' associations (55 percent).

- **Confidence, credibility, and commitment.** Sixty-five percent of teachers surveyed said that the grant project helped improve their self-confidence. Teachers also reported that receiving a national grant heightened their credibility in their school system and community and gave them an avenue for demonstrating competence. Seventy-three percent said that because of their increased credibility, they were better able to influence others.

- **Proposal writing skills.** Of the project directors surveyed, 48 percent said they had gained considerable skill in proposal writing as a result of the NFIE process. Several reported that they had become a "proposal expert" in their schools. The skills of successful proposal writers including careful planning, clear ideas, and good organization, are skills that apply broadly to good teaching.

EFFECTS OF PROGRAM ON STUDENTS

The positive effects of the Dropout Prevention Program on teachers have translated into improved outcomes for students. Of the projects funded during 1991 through 1993 that documented a standard set of student outcome variables, **the majority reported improvements in attendance, behavior, grades, promotion/retention rates, and test scores.**

- **School attendance.** Nine of the 18 projects that collected attendance data reported improved attendance rates. (An additional three projects already had attendance rates of over 94 percent.)

- **Disruptive behavior.** Of nine programs that collected behavioral data, six reported improvement.

- **Grades.** Among the 17 projects that reported on students' grades, 10 noted improvements for participating students.

- **Grade level retention.** Seven projects studied retention rates, and all but one reported improvement.

- **Standardized tests.** Eight projects examined performance on standardized tests, and five reported improvement.

- **Anecdotal evidence.** Interviews, case studies, and other information sources offer evidence of student improvements in motivation, attitudes, diligence, and teacher and peer relationships.

The Dropout Prevention Program legacy suggests that teachers who are most effective in teaching children at risk of school failure share certain qualities, including a strong personal commitment to helping students with special needs, a vision for what they hope to accomplish, and a deep sense of concern and caring for the children they teach.

IMPACT ON COLLEAGUES, SCHOOLS, AND OTHERS

Dropout Prevention projects often produced a ripple effect beyond the immediate circle of participating teachers and students. With the leadership and collaborative skills acquired from their projects, teachers often were able to influence their colleagues, schools, or districts to respond more effectively to the needs of students at risk of school failure.

- **Positions of influence.** Several project directors reported taking charge of professional development in their school or district or assuming formal supervisory positions, which enabled them to influence instructional strategies, philosophy, and learning environment across a broader area.
- **Project institutionalization.** Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents said that their program had been continued after the NFIE grant ended, and 75 percent reported that their projects had been expanded to encompass additional students, classrooms, or schools.
- **Parents and communities.** Many project teachers worked closely with parents and community members and engaged them in a range of activities to support children's education.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The Dropout Prevention Program experience highlights several issues that others might consider in formulating their own policies for professional development and school reform.

- **Teacher-directed grants.** NFIE grants redefined the role of the teacher as a generator and director of instructional strategies instead of a passive conduit for the wisdom of other experts. As the Dropout Prevention Program demonstrated, teachers can carry out these responsibilities very effectively when they are entrusted with authority and given appropriate supports. Grants to teachers do not have to be large to be effective.
- **New teacher roles.** As the Dropout Prevention Program suggests, teachers should not have to become administrators to use their leadership skills and be recognized and compensated. Accomplished teachers need new kinds of professional situations through which they can share their expertise with

others and still remain in the teaching profession. There are responsibilities in addition to direct student contact that teachers can—and should—undertake that will contribute to improved student learning.

- **Site-based management.** The skills used in managing Dropout Prevention grants are quite similar to those demanded by site-based management, and NFIE projects offer prototypes for how teachers can be productively involved in site-based management. For example, teachers who are veterans of site-based management could be tapped to provide professional development to teachers in novice sites. The NFIE experience suggests that the bottom-line goal of site-based management should be student success, rather than teacher involvement as an end in itself. Further, the NFIE experience confirms the critical need for teachers in a site-based management situation to have ongoing support, collegial interaction, and opportunities to improve management skills.

- **Systemwide reforms.** Grants to individual teachers may not promote coherent, systemic reform among an entire school staff. The NFIE experience suggests that special strategies must be developed to encourage teacher-led schoolwide or districtwide reform.

- **Teacher time.** NFIE grantees encountered problems finding sufficient time to carry out all their responsibilities, not unlike the time problems faced by all teachers. Only 33 percent of surveyed teachers said that they received considerable release time or other positive schedule changes. Fifty-eight percent said there was little or no provision of release time for project management. This suggests the need for school reform efforts to consider new concepts of time organization.

- **Children at risk of school failure.** The distribution of NFIE projects signals that students at risk of school failure can be found in all types of communities, including small-towns and middle-class areas. To educate a changing student population, teachers will need different kinds of preparation and professional development. An issue for further study is how to extend the NFIE professional development model to a large number of teachers.

ROLES FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION AFFILIATES

The Dropout Prevention Program experience also suggests some ways in which state and local NEA affiliates can support professional development programs focused on children at risk of school failure.

- **Negotiations.** As part of their responsibilities for negotiating contracts, working conditions, teacher duties, and compensation, affiliates could address such issues as teacher roles in professional development, the allocation of

teacher time for professional development and collegial interaction, and new leadership roles for teachers.

- **Public education.** It may not be apparent to taxpayers why teachers need to spend time away from students or why they should support more "in-service." Affiliates could be catalysts for a public education campaign or disseminate publications that explain why teachers need time for professional development and how this benefits children.

II Introduction

Chartered in 1969 by the National Education Association (NEA), the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt foundation that provides financial assistance, professional development, and leadership opportunities to educators with creative ideas for improving public education. Over the years, NFIE has initiated a range of programs to improve education.

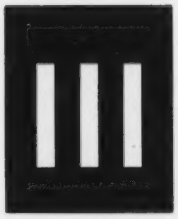
One NFIE program is the Dropout Prevention Program, launched in 1985 with funding from the NEA and sustained in recent years with contributions from NIKE, Inc., Sears-Roebuck Foundation, ARCO Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Prudential, and other corporate and foundation partners. Now in its final year, the Dropout Prevention Program provided grants and related professional development to public school teachers who designed promising programs to encourage success among students at risk of school failure. From the first competition in 1986 through 1994, over 100 teachers received grants and operated projects.

To keep educators abreast of successful approaches that can be replicated, NFIE has evaluated and publicized exemplary projects developed with Dropout Prevention Program funding. A series of reports entitled *Blueprints*

for Success summarized design principles for dropout prevention programs, highlighted strategies for community mobilization, and identified lessons from successful projects (NFIE 1986, 1987, 1990). As these publications have stressed, teacher-developed projects can be an effective way to improve retention and academic achievement for students at risk of school failure.

This publication has a different focus: it examines the impact of the NFIE Dropout Prevention Program on teachers and the implications of the program for professional development. What sets apart the NFIE initiative from many other successful dropout prevention efforts is the Foundation's commitment to building teacher capacity through ongoing technical assistance, consultation, workshops, mentoring, and other supports. This report examines the effect of this combination of support strategies on teachers' professional and personal development, the quality of their teaching, and their ability to foster change among students, colleagues, schools, parents, and the community. The report also identifies policy issues from the NFIE experience that are relevant to other professional development and school reform efforts.

The information in this document comes from interviews with participating teachers and NFIE staff, a retrospective survey of 57 teachers who directed projects during 1986-1991, case studies of four representative projects, Dropout Prevention project evaluations and annual reports, and data on student outcomes collected by projects funded in school years 1991-92 and 1992-93. *(See Appendix.)* In keeping with the view that stories "provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems . . . [and] invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect" (Witherell and Noddings 1991, p. 280), the report draws heavily from teachers' personal narratives about the impact of the Dropout Prevention Program on their personal evolution and professional effectiveness.



Program Overview

***In rural Marion** County, Florida, a community where many adults do not have a high school diploma, teacher Brenda Chisholm used her NFIE grant to help fourth- and fifth-graders build academic skills and see connections between school and work through first-hand experiences with dairy farming. An outgrowth of Chisholm's own background raising calves to earn college money, the Target on Pupil Success program made students responsible for the care and business aspects of raising two or three calves in a barn on school grounds. Science, math, language arts, and other curricular content were integrated into real-life experiences: students charted the calves' food consumption, tracked weights on computers, wrote up remedies for illness, and estimated profits from sales. Chisholm involved parents in the project, encouraging them to visit the classroom and work with children on computers or check out materials for home use. She also hosted a family cookout after every report card period—an event typically attended by 100 family members and, according to Chisholm, a good opportunity for informal conferences with parents normally intimidated by meetings. Chisholm's vision has spread to another district, where she offers workshops to teachers and principals on her approach to educating students at risk of school failure.*

__When Lona Davies__ was pursuing her masters' degree, she came up with a plan to immerse children at risk of school failure in college experiences so that they, too, might have a dream to pursue. NFIE funding enabled Davies to turn her vision into the Kidpower University program, a collaboration between Valencia Park Elementary School and San Diego State University. Teachers and university faculty helped 70 fourth-graders learn science and explore engineering careers through hands-on projects in a university environment. When the students returned from their first field trip, Davies reported being "euphoric," saying:

> *Taking them to the university—having them work with professors on elaborate science projects—was everything that I thought it was going to be. The kids can hardly wait for the next trip. They are working harder. They know they have to succeed in school to have college be an ultimate goal.*

__Susan Belt's project__ harnessed the motivational power of community service. Students at Crispus Attucks Junior High School in Indianapolis developed and obtained grants for their own community service projects: working with the homeless, planting a butterfly and hummingbird garden in a nearby park, and producing a video on caring for domestic animals. Half of the school's 65 staff members stayed after school to assist students with their projects. "We have tied into the beliefs and values of everyone," said Belt. The success of the program has encouraged the school to integrate community service learning into its regular academic curriculum.

These three projects illustrate the diverse strategies supported by the NFIE Dropout Prevention Program in 1992-93. In addition to helping students stay in school and improve their achievement and motivation, the program demonstrated new approaches to teacher professional development. **Central to the program's philosophy was the concept of "capacity-building"—providing opportunities for participating teachers to develop skills and abilities that would help them implement their projects and become more effective in the classroom and in their professional practice.** The program emphasized professional development in every phase, from writing the initial grant, through implementing the program, to "institutionalizing" the project, or sustaining the project when the NFIE grant ended.

A TEACHER-DIRECTED GRANT PROGRAM

NFIE believes that since teachers are the persons closest to students and most directly involved in the educational process, they are likely to know what students need and to have creative visions for meeting those needs. The Dropout Prevention Program made competitive grants and offered a combination of sup-

ports to teachers to implement projects of their own design that addressed the needs of students at risk of school failure. Teachers conceived the strategies, controlled project budgets, directed implementation, and evaluated the program. (The local NEA affiliate and sometimes school districts, served as a fiscal agent, providing bookkeeping services.)

The competitive nature of the program helped bring forward new talent and new ideas. Teachers selected for grants had reached a critical moment in their professional development when they were ready to take risks, change practices, and face a challenge. As Carol Edwards, NFIE director of programs, said:

> To make the commitment to write the grant proposal in the first place means that you are at a special point in your career. You have an idea. You believe you can do it. And you *want* to do it.

Providing funding directly to teachers—rather than to an administrator or the district's general account—was essential to the program's philosophy. As explained by Donnis Deever, a grantee and later a mentor to other participants:

> The moment dollars get into the general funds they have a tendency to get lost in the mix or to be called one thing and show up used for another. With the teacher controlling those dollars, they get used for exactly what they were intended to be used for and at the discretion of the teacher. It gives [teachers] a piece of the power that did not exist before, because we usually don't control the dollars.

Some teachers were reluctant at first to assume full budgetary control, said John Cox, a long-time consultant to the program. Cox gave the example of a teacher who had received a two-year grant. In the first year, the school system administered the funds, and the teacher referred to the grant as "their money." In the second year, she labeled it "our money." By the third year, she was emphatically saying "my money." That example, said Cox, is typical of teachers' evolving understanding about their authority.

NUMBERS AND AMOUNTS OF GRANTS

From 1986 to 1994, the NFIE Dropout Prevention Program awarded over $2 million for 103 projects in 30 states. During these eight years, NFIE received over 2,000 applications, a ratio of almost 20 applicants for each Dropout Prevention award. A large proportion of applicants had never before applied for a grant. For example, from a sample of 63 applicants surveyed in 1986, 56 percent were first-time grant applicants (Amann 1992).

The individual grant amounts decreased over time. During the first three years, awards averaged about $25,000. In the middle years of the program, as

NFIE branched out to support other initiatives, the total funding for the program declined, and NFIE made smaller awards—about $5,000 on average with a maximum two-year grant of $10,000. The intent was to make as many grants as possible, but still ensure that individual grant amounts were adequate to implement quality projects. Support of about $500,000 from NIKE, Inc., supplemented funds available for Dropout Prevention Program grants between 1991 and 1993. Over the two-year period, NFIE made 41 one- and two-year grants averaging nearly $13,000. Grant amounts varied widely from $1,600 to $20,000.

RANGE OF PROJECTS

Projects were as diverse as the personalities of the teachers who designed them. **Projects addressed all levels, from kindergarten through high school; targeted different groups of students, from young limited-English-proficient children to teenage parents; and encompassed a range of innovative, customized activities.** Projects varied in terms of the number of teachers involved, their relationships with school and district administration, and the degree of involvement of parents and community mentors. Among the projects newly funded in 1992-93, for example, were a $15,000 grant for a student-run flight academy; a $9,500 grant for a two-way language project using cross-age tutoring to build language skills and multicultural understanding; an $18,000 grant for a study skills academy for middle-school students; and a $5,000 grant for a parent-child computer project.

Grant funds subsidized a variety of expenditures such as:

- time for teachers to work with students before or after school;
- time for teachers to collaborate with each other and with others in the school and community;
- special equipment or materials for the classroom;
- workshops to help teachers address the needs of students at risk of school failure;
- field trips for students and special events involving parents; and
- media and other public relations efforts.

CONTINUAL REVISION

NFIE regularly reviewed and evaluated the Dropout Prevention Program and revised it based on the findings. A 1987 external evaluation made several recommendations to clarify policies, refine award processes, and conduct follow-up activities (NFIE, *A Blueprint for Success: Lessons Learned*, 1990). Ultimately these suggestions were incorporated into the program.

Based on past findings about characteristics of successful projects, NFIE program criteria encouraged projects that:

- were designed and implemented by teachers;
- were student centered;
- set high but reasonable expectations for students and emphasized strategies for improving student learning;
- intervened early;
- involved parents in significant ways;
- included high levels of community collaboration; and
- included high levels of school district support (NFIE, "NFIE Announces," 1992).

In the later years of the Dropout Prevention Program, NFIE also strengthened its efforts to collect data on student performance. Toward this end, project guidelines directed proposals to specify clearly which outcomes were expected and how these outcomes would be measured. Guidelines further recommended approaches that had a good chance of being expanded in the school and replicated elsewhere.

COMBINED STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORT

Recognizing that successful implementation of dropout prevention programs entails complex skills that are not often taught in teacher preparation programs, NFIE coupled the grants with a combination of support strategies for project directors. Grantees received ongoing consultation, technical assistance, and capacity-building workshops from NFIE staff, consultants, and veteran project directors. Through this assistance, teacher grantees learned how to write proposals, develop budgets, plan and refine programs, raise additional funds, gather instructional resources and materials, build coalitions, conduct evaluations, and sustain projects after NFIE funding ended.

Several teachers found NFIE's comprehensive support to be unique among grant programs. As Susan Belt of the Crispus Attucks community service project said:

> I've received a number of grants and this is the only organization that has not just given us the money and said "go do your program." They bring us to D.C. twice a year to give us the resources we need, to teach us how to collaborate better with our staffs so our program will be long-lasting.

Over the years, NFIE expanded and refined its support strategies to reflect

growing knowledge. In the program's early years, NFIE staff monitoring consisted of reviewing quarterly reports from grantees, with only limited staff involvement in project implementation. After realizing that some projects were not being implemented according to the proposal or were seriously behind schedule, NFIE staff increased their monitoring and changed their strategies.

NFIE eliminated the lengthy and detailed guidelines in the project announcement and instead made the project agreement a vehicle for defining up front what was expected of grantees. The four mandated project reports, which NFIE found to be burdensome and ineffective, were reduced to two per year and redesigned to help project directors "take stock of where they are," according to Carol Edwards. In the final year, said Edwards, the reports have been "a tool to help [teachers] take a macro view of their project—to step outside of it, assess it, and look at how it is making a difference."

In the final years of the program, technical assistance began before the grant period, when NFIE staff and consultants met with project leaders to discuss the project agreement, determine how funds would be used, and develop procedures for fiscal management. "It's very difficult," said John Cox, who frequently handled these discussions. "Often [project leaders] don't know what is wanted or needed. They can't provide answers for some questions, such as anticipating their cash flow needs." To help project directors with these issues, NFIE staff engaged in extensive discussions about expenditure options, restrictions on funding, cash flow, and other fiscal matters.

Technical assistance continued throughout the project period and included site visits. Among the issues that received frequent attention were project management concerns, curriculum content, strategies for increasing parental involvement, child development, pedagogical strategies, and techniques for addressing special learning needs.

CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOPS

In 1990 NFIE sought to further improve its monitoring and to develop teacher skills by introducing two capacity-building workshops annually as part of its comprehensive support strategies. Regular workshops became an important component of NFIE support.

At these three-day workshops, veteran teacher project directors and NFIE staff and consultants shared expertise with current project leaders, offering guidance on such issues as program management, assessment, public relations, parent involvement, community and district support, and program institutionalization. Each workshop was evaluated by participants and redesigned based on their comments.

Several teachers interviewed spoke at length about the value of these workshops. Donnis Deever observed that teachers

> . . . come out of this workshop experience renewed and refreshed and ready to go back to the classroom for months more of what it takes to carry on day by day. You think, "I'm doing a million things and nobody cares," and then NFIE brings you here and assumes the best of you professionally and tries to identify the areas where you are interested in some more information. You go back feeling honored as a professional. There aren't a lot of ways, unfortunately, that that happens for teachers anywhere.

Teacher Judith Crum, who started an after-school homework club in Villa Park, California, reported that the capacity-building workshops helped her grow professionally, particularly in the areas of time management and project evaluation. "I think about things differently" as a result of the workshops, she said.

Beverly Clay-McNamara, head of the *Reach Up* project in San Diego, found the workshop to be an affirmative experience:

> No one in education really tells you that you have done a good job. When you come to a workshop like this, and they say, "You have done a good job and you are leaders in your profession," you feel that maybe there's something you've done in your career that will make a difference.

MENTORING

In 1993-94, NFIE added mentoring to its support strategies, pairing each grantee with a former project director as mentor. The aim was to offer current directors an ongoing source of support. As mentor Donnis Deever explained, "The mentorship idea is a way to keep people connected to each other and serve each other in a way that honors them in the best sense." Another purpose of the mentoring strategy was to enable NFIE to study the effectiveness of teacher-to-teacher mentoring as a model of professional development.

One project director reported that her mentor called her at least once a month and "almost anticipates what I need." In addition to advising on problems, answering questions, and sharing ideas, the mentor has recommended other grants to apply for and suggested computer software to support the project. "She has provided me with the support to know that I can ask for help and made me feel real comfortable with what I am doing," this teacher said.

Mentorship also provided a vehicle for the teacher-mentors to develop their leadership skills. After the NFIE mentoring experience, several teachers created teacher mentoring programs in their own schools or districts.

IV Effects on Teachers

Current organizational theory stresses the importance of meaningful work and continuous learning in the workplace (Senge 1990), and education is no exception. Teachers need ongoing opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills and apply new capabilities in meaningful ways. Empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that NFIE's Dropout Prevention Program, particularly the multiple forms of support, gave teachers opportunities for this type of professional growth and contribution.

Although some of the teachers who received grants "probably would have gone just as far" without the program, according to John Cox, "for the majority, the money opened the doors and started them on their way toward being empowered—which is synonymous with their own development."

Based on a teacher survey, interviews, project evaluations and reports, and case studies, NFIE has identified several specific outcomes for teachers involved in the Dropout Prevention Program. Teachers reported that their project experiences enabled them to:

- conceive and put into practice *creative ideas* for keeping students in school;

- develop and demonstrate *leadership abilities* and assume new leadership roles;
- acquire *knowledge and skills* useful in teaching children who are at risk of school failure;
- increase capabilities for *collaboration*, teamwork, and sharing;
- gain *confidence and pride* in their careers and *credibility* within their school systems and community; and
- learn *proposal writing* skills.

Each of these outcomes is described below.

CREATIVE IDEAS

NFIE found that the availability of grants stimulated teachers to devise new approaches for helping students, flesh out a promising but sketchy concept with which they had been toying, or put into practice a vision that had been taking shape for some time.

An evaluation of the NFIE program confirmed that project leaders were "clearly committed to their vision . . . [and were] trying things they [had] never done before" (SJO Associates 1988, p. 20). And as one teacher asserted, "The freedom to try ideas and learn from them is a rare privilege in our profession."

Several project directors noted that the grant had enabled them to realize long-standing dreams for improving education. One project director wrote, "I owe it to you in seeing and supporting my dream." Another teacher said, "I will tell my colleagues that if they have a dream or if something is not going the way they think it should, go search for a grant, write it, and change things."

LEADERSHIP ABILITIES

"Leadership is making the things happen that you believe in or envision" (Roland Barth, cited in Sergiovanni 1994, p. 170). Evidence from the Dropout Prevention Program suggests that project experiences helped build leadership skills in teachers and demonstrated new ways of using teachers' leadership talents.

John Cox said that most of the 50 or so project directors with whom he has worked were not viewed as leaders outside their own classrooms prior to receiving the NFIE grant. Yet from many teachers, the project elicited leadership abilities that had gone unrecognized. Cox told the story of a grantee whose project succeeded in pulling in *all* students who were not coming to school; in six months, the school went from the bottom to the top of the district in attendance.

It was not unusual for teachers to be tentative at first about taking on new leadership roles. As one teacher said:

> My comfort zone is in the classroom, but administration is stretching for me. I was now responsible—the records, the paperwork, everything was suddenly on my shoulders . . . . That first training, I was very relieved to find out as many people were scared as I was.

As teachers progressed with implementation of their projects, however, they became more comfortable with their new leadership roles.

One hallmark of effective leadership is the capacity to influence others (Sergiovanni 1994). **About three-quarters of the teachers responding to the program survey indicated that their ability to influence others had changed considerably as a result of the project** *(see Figure 3)*. Donnis Deever, for example, said that her role as project director

> . . . put me in situations where I have the ability to influence our associate superintendent on some decisions . . . . Because I now knew where the money comes from and how it flows, I've been able to start two alternative schools in the evening by re-channeling the money that I knew was available . . . . It happened not because there was a declared administrative change, but because I knew the pieces that I could take and fit together to get it to happen anyway.

Risk-taking is another trait of effective leaders (Sergiovanni 1994). In a school setting, the risks of changing practices can be high, especially if there is potential to cause educational harm to children. As Lona Davies said, she felt that she had to "make sure it succeeds. I'm not the kind that likes failures."

The ongoing contact and support provided by the grant program created "a kind of safety net," according to Carol Edwards, which bolstered teachers' courage to take risks. "They know we're in there slugging away with them," she said, "and they see us as humane, collegial, and as problem-solvers." Even when projects did not turn out as expected, said Edwards, teachers learned important lessons about risk-taking. Grantee Lona Davies concurred that the opportunity to talk with other grantees about their diverse projects made her more willing to try different ideas.

Sixty-five percent of the teachers surveyed reported that their risk-taking behavior increased as a result of program participation *(see Figure 4)*.

Although Beverly Clay-McNamara had 24 years' teaching experience and was viewed as a leader in developmental education within her grade, she did not see herself as a leader in the school until her project brought her in close contact with teachers in other grades. She described what risk-taking meant for her:

> The risk of acknowledging mistakes, for example, is a very difficult part of leadership. You've taken a risk, gone in a new direction, maybe it was a little too fast or it wasn't the right direction. The project has helped foster that kind of leadership in me.

Other participating teachers reported that they learned how to share leadership and delegate responsibilities—an important realization, according to an evaluation report of the first 21 funded projects. "Project directors who work with others as a team say that they need the support and energy of others to keep themselves going when there's a lot to get done," a 1988 evaluation stated (SJO Associates 1988, p. 20). One teacher described her new approach to shared leadership as follows:

> I often get overwhelmed by the magnitude of everything that needs to be done. I've learned that I need to spread the wealth, [that I] need other people. It scares me to give up parts of the project, but I realize now that it is of utmost importance to myself, the students, and the school . . . .

Susan Belt concurred:

> Before [I became project director] I did not see myself as a leader at all. Now I do. I'm a team leader, and I have learned I need other people. I can't implement a project unless there are other staff members with me.

According to teacher interviews, the NFIE support strategies also built valuable management and budgeting skills, such as long-range strategic planning, goal-setting, resource administration, and time management.

In addition to cultivating leadership skills, the Dropout Prevention Program helped redefine conventional notions of school leadership by demonstrating new leadership roles for teachers. As Donnis Deever asserted, many teachers already possess various leadership skills, but "until someone recognizes them and provides a vehicle to put those skills out in front of other people, they can go unrecognized." In her view, the Dropout Prevention Program provided this vehicle by encouraging teachers to apply their skills to new challenges.

As reported on the NFIE teacher survey, many former project directors have assumed new leadership roles outside their classrooms *(see Figure 5)*. Fifty-six percent of respondents said they had assumed a more influential role in decision-making meetings. Forty percent reported taking on new leadership in professional organizations; 47 percent indicated new roles in developing educational policy; and 47 percent reported greater involvement in educational improvement initiatives. Among the improvement activities in which teachers reported considerably increased involvement were program planning (with 67 percent reporting greater involvement), curriculum shaping (58 percent), and professional development (65 percent) *(see Figure 6)*.

Teachers also reported considerable change in membership on committees, including curriculum committees (42 percent), advisory boards (46 percent), and program improvement committees (56 percent) *(see Figure 7)*. For example, the director of a project for pregnant teens was appointed to the board of directors of a community organization that dealt with adolescent pregnancy issues.

The grant experience also stimulated the career ambitions of many teachers. Several project directors have pursued graduate degrees. And as discussed in more detail in the next section, many have received promotions or assumed administrative positions. One teacher attributed her promotion to science coordinator to her involvement with the project, according to John Cox. Another teacher, after participating in the NFIE Dropout Prevention Program, reapplied for a job for which she had once been turned down; this time she got the job. Other project directors have been put in charge of programs for underserved students across their district or region.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

NFIE grants helped teachers acquire knowledge and skills useful in educating children at risk of school failure.

For one Indianapolis middle-school teacher, the Crispus Attucks community service project changed his entire understanding of student learning and success. This teacher is conducting research on the concept of service learning. He said:

> This project has stretched me so far that I don't even recognize the old me. It has empowered me to be happy at teaching. Now I have a real need to understand all the current research and theories and how they apply to me and to my kids.

Program evaluation was another area in which teachers felt that they had developed their knowledge. One teacher reported that she had learned "to use various forms of evaluation congruently to support my work and present it clearly to different audiences."

Surveyed teachers cited other pedagogical areas in which they felt that the NFIE project had improved their competencies: curriculum improvement (77 percent), school organization (58 percent), school change (71 percent), and planning (71 percent) *(see Figure 2)*. Parent involvement was another area in which teachers reported increased knowledge.

Many teachers observed that their communication skills had improved. Teachers reported making a considerable number of speeches to parent groups (54 percent), community groups (53 percent), and the business community (40 percent) *(see Figure 11)*. Donnis Deever said that she is now able to "stand in front of any classroom, any group of people, and not even think about it anymore." Another teacher noted that the demand for information about her project honed her speaking skills:

> I had never done workshops before. I've always been one that would stay in the back and do my own thing. And I've had to move up front and speak. Also, I get a lot of calls about the program. I used to rattle on and forget things because I got so excited talking about it. So now I

keep an outline by my phone.

Some teachers indicated that they had improved their effectiveness in using educational technology. Beverly Clay-McNamara said that doing all her project work on the computer encouraged her to learn more about computers. Another teacher, who said he knew nothing about computers at the start of the grant, obtained a masters' degree in computer science and is planning to complete a Ph.D.

COLLABORATION

"A lot of teachers have never worked adult to adult," said John Cox. "They've worked adult to child." By creating new opportunities for teachers to cooperate with each other, administrators, and community members, the Dropout Prevention Program helped teachers see the benefits of collaboration and new working arrangements.

Josephine Richey, whose Rapid City, South Dakota, project provided students with mentors and incentives to improve their attendance, related one of the most important things that she learned:

> [N]o one is an island. . . . No matter what you do, you're never going to do it alone. Without a support system of some kind, no matter how much you want something to succeed, it will not because you cannot do it by yourself.

The NFIE program fostered collaboration from the very outset, with the writing of the proposal. According to a study of successful and unsuccessful Dropout Prevention applicants in 1986, an average of six people—primarily teachers, counselors, and administrators—were significantly involved in developing each proposal (SJO Associates 1987). Teacher Judith Crum confirmed the importance of engaging others in the program-planning and grant-writing process:

> [I]t's more than one person can really do. It forced me to pull other people in when usually I would just take something home and do it myself and stay up all night to get it done. The things I am doing now I can't do by myself. I need the input of other people and their support.

The need for collaboration continued through the implementation stage. As Judith Crum explained, the grant project brought together a different group of teachers than her normal working arrangements, and they have formed "a really close relationship" as they "discuss all aspects" of the project. Similarly, an Indianapolis middle-school teacher described how the community service project directed by Susan Belt transformed relationships among teachers in her school:

> We have been put off into little pods . . . . Whatever we were doing we kept to ourselves. Now it's no longer that way. In this project we share

and we are good listeners. Most of all I see teachers empowered to do the job.

Surveyed teachers strongly agreed that the Dropout Prevention Program helped them develop valuable skills in collaboration and networking. Eighty-four percent of surveyed teachers indicated that the project director's skill in coalition building was of considerable importance to project effectiveness *(see Figure 9)*. Sixty-seven percent said that they had developed considerable skill in building coalitions as a result of the grant *(see Figure 2)*. A substantial majority of respondents also said that they were better able to influence others as a result of the extended networks (77 percent) and broader contacts (68 percent) acquired through the project *(see Figure 3)*.

Most project directors surveyed reported that their interaction with other professionals increased considerably as a result of the project. Increased interaction occurred with teaching colleagues (74 percent), administrators (68 percent), parents (58 percent), community members (56 percent), and teachers' associations (55 percent). A significant share of teachers also reported greater interaction with education support personnel (49 percent), business (47 percent), and government (30 percent) *(see Figure 8)*.

As a result of these collaborative relationships, teachers learned new skills from each other, provided mutual support, and viewed colleagues as equal contributors rather than competitors. Both Josephine Richey and her teaching partner were teaching ninth-grade English for the first time; working together, they gained deeper understanding of how to design curriculum and acquired other competencies, according to Richey. Richey said that she learned a great deal from watching her teaching partner work effectively with students in gangs and those "who are truly at risk" of school failure. By the same token, she said, her partner learned organizational skills from her. "It's been a good match," Richey said.

Lona Davies also described a similarly beneficial relationship with a project partner in another school district. "We have had a lot of sharing of ideas," she said. Davies shared her knowledge of technology with her partner, who knew "absolutely nothing about computers," and in return, Davies drew upon her partner's knowledge of science.

CONFIDENCE, COMMITMENT, AND CREDIBILITY

Participating teachers reported that the grant process helped them gain confidence and pride, particularly in areas of expertise beyond classroom teaching. Sixty-five percent of teachers surveyed said that the grant project resulted in improved self-confidence *(see Figure 4)*. As one teacher noted, "The grant gave me the confidence to go on. The feeling of being appreciated, rewarded, and validated was very important to me." Said another, "The grant

represents the first time I found respect for myself as a professional."

Constance Dumas, who initiated a parental involvement project in Indianapolis, said that she had become much more assertive. "I've always been quiet and shy and hadn't gotten up in front of a crowd," she said. "Now I do. I even got up at the NEA National Assembly [the National Education Association's annual meeting, which includes more than 9,500 delegates]."

Another teacher told John Cox, "The major thing I learned from this project is that there is nothing I can't do." According to Cox, this teacher did not request second-year NFIE funding because she had already obtained funds from another source and was negotiating for more. He recalled her saying:

> I will get the funding for continuing my project, and not only that, I'm never going to worry about selling my program to a principal again. I used to plead with them and make these long cases about why it was good and worthwhile. Now, I'm just going to tell them I've got the money for this program, and they're going to go with me, or I'm going somewhere where they will.

"Now that's an entirely different woman from the one who started the project," said Cox.

Carol Edwards remarked that when project directors exchanged ideas at the workshops, they validated their personal knowledge about project leadership and education for students with special needs, and thereby gained an important perspective on their own competence:

> They were able to say "I really do have some expertise. What I thought is not just me alone in my classroom." They understood this by working and talking with people from all across the country who have similar views.

John Cox concurred:

> They find out that the things they think are peculiar to them are not peculiar to them. They find out they have the same problems, the same mistakes, and then they feel better. It brings their confidence level up.

According to evaluations of capacity-building workshops, teachers felt that the workshops strengthened their confidence. The following were typical comments:

- "This is probably the best personal empowerment experience I have had in 28 years of teaching. You make me feel worthwhile."
- "I have never felt so proud to be a teacher. You made me feel like I was in a profession that was respected."
- "I have never been so affirmed professionally . . . . I sense this grant will be

an opportunity for a leap in professional development that I hadn't anticipated."

- "What you have done for me is what we hope to do for students, show them what they can be if they are willing to work for it . . . . You don't just pass out money, you inspire dreams; you've inspired me."
- "After this second workshop, I am really convinced that I'm going to make these phone calls for second-year funding. I think I have the confidence to do that, and I really didn't before."

Being selected for a grant by a national body also seemed to heighten the credibility of teachers and endorse their competence in the eyes of their school system and community. And as they implemented their projects, teachers were able to demonstrate to others that they were competent, committed professionals. Indeed, 79 percent of the surveyed teachers indicated that the personal credibility of the project directors was considerable to extensive. Seventy-three percent said that because of their increased credibility, they were better able to influence others *(see Figure 3)*.

Josephine Richey said that although she had already enjoyed respect from her peers, the NFIE grant increased her credibility with the school administration:

> I've certainly gotten much more attention from the administration. I'm the only teacher I know who has total access to the computer system, who as a classroom teacher has been given the ability to schedule students, who has been given the right to re-schedule teachers in some cases, to say to the administration I would like a teacher released from a particular duty so they can work on this project instead.

Constance Dumas concurred that her stock with district administrators rose and that they consulted with her on other projects. In addition, the state department of education asked her to conduct workshops. She said that as a result of her grant project:

> I am seen as a leader in science reform. I am seen as a great grant writer. I am seen as a leader who wants to give as a professional to the community. I am really respected by my peers.

This outside affirmation is particularly important in a profession whose members are unaccustomed to being acclaimed by the larger community. Program mentor Donnis Deever, who is familiar with several Dropout Prevention projects, summarized the new kinds of affirmation and credibility that a grant brings:

> Just getting the grant gives people recognition they have not had in their districts. Many of these grants show up in newspapers and local publi-

cations or in newsletters. They get phone calls from all over the United States. They make presentations in the local areas that they never even dreamed of before. They find themselves going out in front of civic organizations talking about their projects and then ending up with more money when they weren't even asking for more.

With confidence and credibility has come a deeper commitment to helping students at risk of school failure. **Ninety-eight percent of survey respondents said that participating in the Dropout Prevention Program heightened their desire to make a difference** ***(see Figure 4)***. The story of Rebecca Dunbar from Anchorage, Alaska, is typical:

> I'm no longer satisfied with what is. There's always one more step I want to take. [Before participating in the program] I used to accept that we were the stepchild of the district and was delighted to get whatever they gave me. And I was told "Because you teach pregnant teenagers and that is such a controversial thing, you keep a low profile, and you don't make waves." And now I've been before the school board several times and I know there are a few members of the board who still feel that way, but we're going to get them voted out or we are going to change their minds. I don't mind if someone says I'm old enough to move on so the younger folks can come on. Not yet! I'm not finished yet.

In addition, 87 percent of teachers surveyed said that the project experiences stimulated their vision for improvement *(see Figure 4)*. Susan Belt said that the workshops, in particular, have "given us a vision of a long-term future. That is something I want to continue to feed upon and act upon."

PROPOSAL WRITING SKILLS

Many teachers indicated that they have become proficient in proposal writing as a result of the NFIE project, including several who were initially intimidated by grant applications or reluctant to apply for other reasons.

Josephine Richey said that a colleague sent her a grant application, knowing that she had been working on dropout prevention for six years. Richey's response was, "Are you kidding? I don't know anything about grants!" After receiving "wonderful support" from her school administration, including time to work with the district's grant coordinator, Richey developed a successful proposal.

The NFIE proposal-writing experience helped Lona Davies overcome an "I can't do this" attitude about grants. Davies, who received proposal-writing assistance from a university professor, said that the NFIE process helped her "know that I *could* write a grant and that it is not a scary thing to do." For Rebecca

Dunbar the breakthrough came when she realized that successful grant writing really meant describing on paper her own dreams for her students:

> Grants to me were technical writing and they had to be worded just so and it would not be a pleasure to write. You had to have a plan and use big words and everything had to be in a certain order. Well, some of that is true. But there's still room for describing my dream project and how I'd like to see it achieved, and somebody must be willing to hear that. I guess if you don't have a dream, you don't have anything to write a grant about anyway.

Yet another teacher grantee, who said she was nudged into writing the NFIE proposal by her supervisor, went on to apply for a $400,000 grant to build a complete school facility for pregnant teenagers "with daycare and classrooms and all the things that I have envisioned were needed. It's a very big dream," she said, "that I wasn't sure would come about before I retired. But now I'll hang around and watch my dream happen."

Of the teachers surveyed, 48 percent said they had gained considerable skill in proposal writing as a result of the NFIE process *(see Figure 2)*. One teacher said that she had applied for the grant "as much to learn the grant-writing process as anything else."

Several project directors have taken on the role of "grant expert" in their schools. Constance Dumas noted that her enthusiasm for proposal writing grew "when I realized I could write these proposals easily. It's a gift that I didn't know I had." Dumas described how her graduate school experience with doing science experiments via distance learning inspired her to write a proposal for a state grant to fund a distance learning technology project for her elementary students. Dumas, who has written 14 successful grant applications in four years, now conducts grant development workshops for others.

Judith Crum said she also plays a pivotal grant-seeking role in her school:

> I have one class period a day allotted to help with any grant activities, to search out any other grants we might want to write for, to attend the school administrators' weekly planning meeting—so I've ended up assuming those kind of roles as a result of this. The grant writing is not my favorite thing to do, but I always see it as a challenge. I am working on one right now; others in the school are working on it also, but I am spearheading it and making sure we are all meeting our deadlines.

V Effects on Students, Colleagues, Parents, and Communities

By improving their own knowledge and abilities, grantees in the Dropout Prevention Program fostered change and made an impact on students, colleagues, parents, and communities. Project evaluation data show improvements in students' performance and behavior. Other evidence indicates that project teachers influenced their colleagues and schools to respond more effectively to the needs of students at risk of school failure. Moreover, evidence suggests that projects improved involvement of parents and communities in children's education.

EFFECTS ON STUDENTS

What impact did projects have on success in school for students at risk of school failure? Projects differed in the variables measured, the kind and quality of data collected, and the rigor of their evaluation procedures. Recognizing that evaluation needed to be strengthened, in 1990 NFIE took steps to provide more technical assistance on evaluation issues and to stress the need for setting measurable outcomes in the design phase.

Many projects collected data on student academic performance and behavioral outcomes. Of the projects funded during 1991 through 1993 that documented stu-

dent outcome variables according to a standard format suggested by NFIE, **the majority reported improvements in attendance, behavior, grades, and promotion/retention rates.** For each variable, projects compared participating students with a comparable group of students who did not participate in the project. While projects varied in the type of data collected for each variable, the cumulative picture shows clear, positive results. A summary of data across projects follows.

School attendance. Half of the projects that collected attendance data—nine out of 18 projects—reported improved attendance rates. (An additional three already had attendance rates of over 94 percent.)

For example, among the 30 urban middle-school students in a project in Ohio, 77 percent improved attendance, in contrast to only 21 percent of the comparison group. Conversely, only 9 percent of project participants had increased absenteeism, compared with 52 percent of the other group.

The average number of absences for 22 teen mothers in a high school program in Pennsylvania was 37 for program participants; in the comparison group, it was 64. Similarly, average daily attendance in that project was 78 percent and 67 percent for the comparison group. Twenty-four high school students in a Michigan project missed an average of 16 days during the year, while the comparison group missed an average of 28 days.

For the 50 inner city ninth-graders in another Ohio project, the average number of absences per quarter was approximately seven. This contrasts with an average of 11 absences for the comparison group. About 14 percent of the program participants withdrew from school during the year, while 31 percent of the comparison group did.

Disruptive behavior. For nine programs that collected behavioral data, six reported improvement.

Of 30 students in an Ohio program, for example, four were suspended and two were expelled; in the comparison group of 19 students, 14 were suspended and four were expelled. In a Pennsylvania project, five suspensions occurred among the 45 students, while in the comparison group, 191 suspensions occurred among 65 students.

In the Michigan program, disciplinary referrals were significantly lower for the 24 participants. Participating students accrued a total of 65 after-school or Saturday detentions for the year, compared to 107 such detentions for the 24 students in the comparison group. Among project participants, seven students received a cumulative total of 22 in-school suspensions, while 16 nonparticipants received 37 such suspensions.

Grades. Among the 17 projects that reported on students' grades, 10 noted improvements for participating students.

In an Ohio project, 84 percent of participants boosted their grades, in contrast to 45 percent of the comparison group. There were 14 failing course grades among the 30 project participants, compared with 44 failing grades among the 19 students in the other group.

For the 45 students in the Pennsylvania project, 44 percent passed all their subjects, compared with 22 percent of the other group. The average number of failing course grades for participating students was approximately two; for comparison students, approximately seven.

Students in the Michigan project earned an average GPA of 2.21, compared to the nonparticipant average of 1.58. And in a program in Illinois, of the 81 participating elementary students, 85 percent passed all their courses, compared to 65 percent of the nonparticipant group.

Grade level retention. Seven projects studied retention rates, and all but one reported improvement. Only two of the 30 students in one of the projects, or 7 percent, were retained, while six of 19, or almost one-third, were retained in the comparison group.

Standardized tests. Eight projects examined performance on standardized tests, and five reported improvement. For example, one Ohio project compared the California Achievement Test scores of the 30 project students with 19 nonparticipants. The participant group average on the English test rose by 19 points, while the nonparticipant group showed no statistically significant gain (0.2 point).

Anecdotal evidence. Interviews, case studies, and other information sources offer further testimony about the positive results with students.

One project director observed that her project motivated participating fifth-graders to stay in school:

> I had one student who had missed 28 days in the previous year. And he did not miss any the year he was in the program. And one who had missed almost a hundred days, and she didn't miss any the first semester. It made a significant difference.

One project director perceived improvements in attitude and behavior among middle-school students in her California project, selected because they had grade point averages below 2.0 and were often in trouble. The students and their parents signed a contract, agreeing to follow a highly structured program that met for one hour after school, four days a week. With the help of two teachers, students learned to take responsibility for their work and acquire good study habits. Teachers consulted regularly with parents about positive and negative student behaviors. The project director noticed a turn-around in most of these students:

> They are not seen in the principal's office as much, and they are attend-

ing school more often because they have work to turn in to their classes. They move to a place of feeling pride because they *are* succeeding.

A teacher involved in another program viewed the following positive effects on students:

> I see Afro-American children much happier than they used to be. I see them seeing school as a place where they can get support. I see white children learning more about cultural awareness. It happens because teachers are collaborating and students are cooperating with each other.

Some positive outcomes may be hard to quantify in evaluations, as this anecdote from an Indiana project director illustrates:

> One sixth-grader talked to me about all the times she had been suspended in previous years. The year our program started, she was in as many after-school clubs as she could be and had only been suspended once. She told me about one of the older teachers who had the International Club. "She talks to me about how I should act like a lady," she said. It's little stories like that that you can't measure on the evaluation report.

A significant influence on the success of participating students, though a hard one to assess, was the sustained, personal commitment and attention that students in the program received from effective, concerned teachers. It was not unusual for teachers managing NFIE projects to devote long hours, including after-school time, weekends, and evenings, to helping their students. "These teachers are very caring and have much practical and substantive knowledge about dropout prevention," said Carol Edwards.

As one project director observed, students recognized that the project teachers wanted them to succeed, and often responded. Students could tell that the project teachers "want them to do well, and are willing to put themselves out . . . to make sure that happens."

Another teacher wrote about the incalculable rewards of being a committed educator:

> We did an interview on Channel 4 where I talked about teachers caring about kids. One child was highlighted. Last night his mother called, crying, and said "I didn't know that anyone cared about our children."

Students in the Dropout Prevention Program received encouragement from other adults, too. An elementary student taking part in a senior citizen mentoring program—described by a teacher as a "tough" child, completely uninterested in school—suddenly began showing interest. When asked why, he said, "My Granny expects me to do well."

PROGRAM EFFECTS FOR COLLEAGUES AND SCHOOLS

Dropout Prevention projects often produced a ripple effect beyond the immediate circle of participating teachers and students. The leadership and collaborative skills acquired by grantees during the course of their projects often made them effective and influential models within and beyond their schools. Often project directors began by influencing other teachers in the same school. As one grantee explained:

> Other teachers are starting to ask what we are doing. Only a few, but I'm very encouraged. I also think our core group is working well together . . . . The kids are getting the idea that we are working together for their good.

Josephine Richey's South Dakota project encouraged curriculum integration and team teaching. She contended that this change yielded tangible benefits for students and teachers:

> It has made a big difference in how we're doing business in the total school curriculum. More teachers are interested in teaming and in integrating curriculum as a result of our project's work. For example, a math teacher and a science teacher are getting together to do a special program for ninth-graders who have already dropped out.

The project in Beverly Clay-McNamara's San Diego school produced a similar effect on faculty relations. Clay-McNamara said she was surprised when all the upper elementary teachers came into the project during its second year. "We have not been a very cohesive group," she observed. "The fourth- and fifth-grade teachers usually say they will handle their own problems. Now in the second year of the project, they are enthusiastic about it and want to be included."

Some 70 percent of survey respondents reported a considerable change in relationships with colleagues as a result of the grant project *(see Figure 10)*.

These changed relationships with colleagues were not always positive, however. It was not unusual for other teachers in a school to show jealousy of teachers singled out for special recognition or funding or to resent the extra work or upheaval that accompanied changes in practice. One project director, for example, reported that some of her colleagues were less than eager to fill out student grant-related progress reports to parents or actually berated the students for bringing the report forms to them.

"Dealing with jealousy has been a learning experience," said another teacher, explaining:

> I invited my colleagues into my classroom to see what we were doing, so they would know I wasn't the one calling for recognition . . . . I learned how to draw people in, and how to help them with innovative

> techniques, getting away from books per se and not just sticking to one teaching strategy, to try new things. For example, when I attend the capacity-building workshops, I always get new ideas so I type them up and give them to the rest of the teachers.

To anticipate and head-off problems with jealousy, project mentors counseled beginning project directors to "give their projects away." The more that other teachers were included and given opportunities to share in the credit given to the project, the less likely they were to develop hostility toward the project director and sometimes, toward the project students.

One manifestation of broader impact was the frequency with which projects were continued beyond the NFIE grant period and adopted in other classrooms or schools. In a survey of project directors, 88 percent said that their program had been continued after the grant period ended, and 75 percent reported that their projects had been expanded beyond their initial scope to encompass additional students, classrooms, or schools *(see Figure 1)*. This conforms with earlier NFIE evaluation findings that more than 87 percent of Dropout Prevention projects were continued with district or external funding after NFIE funding expired (NFIE, *A Blueprint for Success: Lessons Learned*, 1990).

One project, for example, served as a model for a $1 million initiative to strengthen science education for minority students across the entire district; the project director was designated to head this larger effort. Another project, Donnis Deever's *Enrichment Seminars* for high school seniors with academic problems, was expanded from one high school to all nine high schools in the district, with at least two sections in each school.

As the Dropout Prevention Program showed, project institutionalization is a skill that can be learned. How to continue a project was a major topic addressed in capacity-building workshops. As Susan Belt remarked:

> The one thing I've learned from NFIE is to "institutionalize." Just because the funding runs out does not mean the program has to stop. If it's a good program it can be part of the school in the long run, and there are a lot of organizations in the community that will help.

Several project directors have gone on to run workshops, counsel their colleagues, or advocate for children at risk of school failure. Donnis Deever, for example, became the district coordinator of services for students at risk of school failure and mentors 25 teachers in her district. "And," she said, "I'll bet you would find many project directors mentoring others in their own districts, so their influence to help kids spirals out from them too."

Deever also said that she influenced the board of education to focus greater attention on the needs of children at risk of school failure:

> There's a perception out there that these kids do it to themselves, that

> they are dumb kids that we don't really have any reason to spend a lot of money on. So what you are doing is helping to change perceptions about that. Whenever I make presentations to the board, I provide the facts and statistics, and I also bring the kids and talk about particular students. I take it down to the personal. And the board comes away with the impression that this is a kid we should have helped.

Others have become known outside their schools as advocates for children at risk of dropping out of school. As one project director wrote:

> It's unnerving when the Governor's office calls to see what you're going to say at the upcoming statewide conference, or to find that the head of [a social service agency] is calling you "that woman," but it's exciting, too, because it means they're having to pay attention to you as you advocate for your kids . . . . When you work with kids who drop out in large numbers, you've got to be a fighter. You've got to be a spear thrower who won't let kids down or see programs die without a fight. [This grant program] gave us the muscle and put us in the spotlight. The rest of it was up to us (Boise Education Association 1988).

Several project directors have moved into teacher leadership or administrative positions. Rebecca Dunbar reported, "Because of the training I have gotten from this and the responsibility I've had to take on, I've been promoted to 'lead teacher.' I now supervise the whole program and there are six teachers and three aides." Another project director became district coordinator of a "full service schools" program that sought to give students ready access to services from community, county, and state agencies.

In one school district, four of the five teachers who initiated the dropout prevention project took on new, more influential roles as a direct result of participation in the project. The project director became the first teacher in the school system to receive a supervisory position in the central office and now heads all outreach activities for the district. Another became a master teacher and works with colleagues all over the district to develop their capacity to educate students at risk of school failure. A third teacher was awarded a $250,000 grant from the district to develop a program to improve education for students at risk of school failure. The fourth person, who served as an assistant principal during her involvement with the project, is now a principal and is developing a comprehensive program for underserved students in her school.

INVOLVING PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Early in the history of the Dropout Prevention Program, NFIE learned the importance of involving parents, a lesson supported by several studies (see Gotts 1989; Henderson and Berla 1994; and Nettles 1991).

Project reports, interviews, and other evidence indicate that many project teachers worked closely with parents and engaged them in activities to support their children's education. One teacher described the significance of her project's parent activities in this way:

> Our parent meeting on Tuesday night went better than my wildest dream could have predicted. Families, including students, were there and it was clear they were supportive of both our program and their children. We did an old-fashioned kids showing off their work thing, and everyone loved it. I think the kids felt really special. What's more, every inroad we make like this brings parent support, so that the parents say, "Stay in school . . . go to school . . . do your work . . . do what the teacher says." They know we care, and sadly . . . that is not something they normally know.

Projects used various strategies to build bridges with parents: potlucks, picnics, and other events, appointment of parents to committees, and seminars or classes to help parents reinforce children's learning. In one project parents ran a mentor program in the school, an activity usually conducted by school counselors.

A 1988 evaluation of NFIE Dropout Prevention projects found several other examples of parent-school linkages:

- Parents and students developed a "contract" for student goals.
- When students were absent, the school would follow up quickly with a phone call to parents.
- Teachers visited students' homes to talk to parents about their children and about school in general.
- Schools organized special events for parents and students.
- Schools offered parent counseling or sessions on effective parenting.

Some projects extended bridges to the larger community. A notable example was the after-school service learning program at Crispus Attucks Middle School, where helping the community was the focus. One teacher involved in this project reported that the project helped students "care more about [their] community, not just thinking they're the only ones that exist."

Other projects engaged community partners as expert resources, mentors, volunteers, and funding contributors. Several projects entailed partnerships with universities, which one teacher said opened up access to "resources that we did not have before in the expertise of the university people."

"We get recognition from businesses," said another teacher. "All kinds of businesses donate items to the project. One even took pictures of us and wrote an

article for the trade journal." The director of a program for pregnant teens was similarly surprised by the results of their outreach to community organizations. "Thousands of dollars of donated items were given . . . bills were paid by anonymous donors, and groups took on projects at the facility," the teacher reported; even the state legislature began a discussion about earmarking funds for dropout prevention.

VI Policy Implications for Professional Development Programs

A major purpose of the NFIE Dropout Prevention Program was to demonstrate new strategies for teacher professional development. From the NFIE experience emerge several issues that educational agencies and organizations, policy makers, foundations, and NEA state and local affiliates might consider in formulating policies and programs for professional development and school reform.

THE VALUE OF TEACHER-DIRECTED GRANTS

As the NFIE program demonstrates, teachers have creative ideas and can be powerful forces for change in their systems, if they are entrusted with authority and "venture capital" to put their visions into practice. **In this context, professional development becomes an active process that helps teachers put into effect their own best ideas, rather than a passive one in which teachers receive knowledge from others.**

The approach of making competitive grants to teachers, accompanied by multiple support strategies, is an effective model that school districts, state or regional educational agencies, NEA affiliates, and other professional associations might consider. Like any other ap-

proach, this one has pitfalls. However, careful design of grant procedures can anticipate and build in ways to avoid the jealous and other negative behaviors that often arise in competitive situations.

As the Dropout Prevention Program shows, the empowerment that teachers gain when an external group acknowledges their judgment and competence translates into better practice in the classroom. Project directors reported that grants gave them a new sense of strength and freedom to try fresh ideas, which revived their energy and spurred them to achieve new teaching and learning goals.

As the NFIE history suggests, grants to teachers do not have to be large to be effective, particularly when other forms of technical assistance and capacity building are available. When NFIE reduced the size of the grants in its Dropout Prevention Program, the Foundation found that teachers accomplished a great deal per dollar spent. In fact, there seemed to be little to no correlation between the grant amounts and the quality of project management or their ability to become institutionalized. Relatively small Dropout Prevention grants leveraged significant changes in professional development, student success, and school reform.

The grant amount did affect how many students could be reached, however. Most grantees worked with under 100 students. Also, few of the NFIE projects were in the nation's largest cities, which may require a larger grant. Moreover, NFIE experience with other grant programs suggests that there may be a critical threshold, a minimum level of funding needed to carry out a high-quality project. More research needs to be done to determine the minimum funding needs in larger districts and to gain a better understanding of the relationship between program funding and program quality.

Finally, the NFIE experience also demonstrates the importance of continually revising programs—at both the national level and the project level—to reflect evaluation findings and changing conditions.

NEW ROLES FOR TEACHERS

By encouraging teachers to develop ideas and seek funding, and by placing budget and administrative control in the hands of teachers, Dropout Prevention grants redefined the role of the teacher as a generator and director of instructional strategies instead of a passive conduit for the instructional wisdom of curriculum directors, supervisors, and school administrators. As NFIE projects demonstrated, teachers can carry out these responsibilities quite effectively when they are provided with appropriate supports.

The NFIE experience suggests the American educational system needs to redefine the role of "teacher" to encompass responsibilities that extend beyond direct student contact. There are other responsibilities that teachers

can—and should—undertake that will contribute to improved student learning. Professional development and collegial interaction should be a significant component of a new definition of teacher. As in other professions, teachers need opportunities throughout their careers to keep up with developments in their field, acquire new knowledge and skills, and exchange ideas with their peers. Also, new roles for teachers can fulfill their desire to function within several professional contexts, for example, with peers in their schools or among colleagues in professional associations. These kinds of experiences can produce visible improvements in a teacher's classroom effectiveness and in student performance. As discussed in greater depth below, these roles will necessitate new approaches to school organization and different ways of thinking about teacher time.

Direct grants are not the only way of endorsing or recognizing teacher excellence. **The Dropout Prevention experience highlights the need for new kinds of professional situations, in which teachers who are accomplished in professional development can share their expertise with others and be recognized and compensated.** In most districts, the administrator track is the only avenue of advancement for teachers who want to exercise leadership abilities. Yet many accomplished teachers could apply their talents more fruitfully to helping their peers, while continuing to interact directly with students.

It makes sense to rethink professional, interpersonal relationships. For example, the relationship between teachers and administrators should be reexamined, to ensure a mutually supportive and respectful relationship that focuses on student learning as the ultimate goal. Also, innovative approaches to working with students at risk of school failure can change teacher-teacher, teacher-student, and teacher-parent relationships in positive ways but sometimes present challenges. A systematic way for figuring out ways to successfully overcome these challenges should become a standard part of collegial discourse.

LESSONS FOR SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT

The skills teachers used in managing Dropout Prevention grants are quite similar to those demanded by site-based management. The NFIE projects illustrate why teachers should be deeply involved in site-based management and offer prototypes for how they can be involved most productively.

First, the NFIE experience suggests that the bottom-line goal of site-based management should be student success. Most of the early versions of site-based management stopped at site management itself, with teacher involvement as an end goal in itself. By contrast, the ultimate goal of the NFIE grant process is to improve outcomes for students at risk of school failure. As Carol Edwards explained, "In the approach we used here, the site-based focus from the very beginning was on student success and student retention; the management skills teachers learned were a means toward that end." The NFIE experience

affirms that it pays to give a strong determining voice to those who are ultimately responsible for student success.

Second, the NFIE program signals the importance of providing teachers with opportunities to acquire and practice management skills within a site-based approach. As the NFIE projects show, the content of professional development need not be restricted to traditional pedagogical and subject-matter issues. Also important are such competencies as leadership, program planning and implementation, fiscal management, and proposal writing. Teachers who gain these skills not only do a better job of implementing their specific grant projects, but also perform better in all aspects of their careers. Teachers with stronger leadership and communication skills, for example, can do a better job in the classroom and interact more effectively with students. As one teacher said:

> I think this level of project assistance and monitoring is probably a lot of the reason that all of your projects seem so successful and that your project directors are so dedicated.

Third, the NFIE experience confirms the critical need for teachers to have ongoing support, consultation, and collegial interaction, in addition to formal professional development workshops or seminars. This continuing support could come from many sources, including other teachers, teacher telecommunications networks, consultants, or community mentors.

Rebecca Dunbar felt that NFIE's ongoing consultation was critical to her project's success. She remarked:

> If you do something wrong, they say, "Let us help you do it right." As a first-time project director, if it had not been for that, I would never have applied for second-year funding. I always knew I could call anytime with a problem, and somebody would say, "Okay, let's talk it through and we'll work it out." It's a friendly kind of help.

Perhaps the most valuable source of counsel and expertise are experienced teachers, such as the NFIE teacher-mentors. The mentor component of the NFIE model also offers a prototype for site-based management. **Teachers who are veterans of site-based management in other schools or districts could be tapped to provide professional development to teachers in novice sites.**

SYSTEMWIDE REFORMS

Only a limited number of projects can be supported by NFIE and similar funding agents. Unless the reforms are extended to schools and then to districts, these projects will exist as islands of success rather than paradigms for broader improvements. Encouraging systemic reform and improving schoolwide learning environments are issues that have implications for all teacher-directed reforms and are particularly challenging issues for NFIE.

One of the lessons NFIE has learned from its Dropout Prevention Program is that individual grants to teachers do not necessarily have a systemic or ripple effect throughout a school. Systemic reform requires a coherent sense of purpose and collaboration among the entire school staff. Providing a grant to one teacher, rather than a team, may not promote coherence. In addition, the goals of a self-contained grant project may not be entirely congruous with the broad reform goals of the school or district. Although beyond the scope of studies that contributed to this report, there is a significant need to identify the exact conditions that give rise to systemic change, and ways to recognize those conditions when they exist.

Recognizing these challenges, NFIE is developing new strategies to encourage systemwide reform through its grant programs and to make the school, rather than the classroom, the basic unit of intervention. Possible approaches include funding schoolwide projects; requiring teams of teachers and principals to collaborate on projects, with principals facilitating supportive changes in school policies; or requiring strong collaboration in the project design. Within these structures, teachers would continue to lead the project and control the funding. With a 1994-95 Dropout Prevention grant, for example, a seven-person North Carolina team established a schoolwide family support center that became a model for the state. As NFIE gains more experience with schoolwide projects, it will continue to evaluate the best approaches for extending reforms.

At the same time, it is important to remember that teachers and students often change one by one, and that projects initiated by individuals can demonstrate what is possible and stimulate others to change.

NEW VIEWS OF TEACHER TIME

NFIE project directors spent considerable time carrying out their additional responsibilities. As with most teachers, the project directors had difficulty finding time in the school day to do what was necessary and serve their students effectively.

About the problem of insufficient time one teacher wrote:

> [T]he administration of this grant is probably at least a part-time job, and in addition to school, it really is too much. If I weren't a high-energy, type A workaholic, it would be impossible.

Later in the project this same teacher revisited the time issue, writing:

> It really does work to take this comprehensive approach. The problem is that it is humanly impossible. Oh, we might be able to do this for one or two years, but never on an ongoing basis. There's just too much to do.

Although NFIE grants were intended to cover release time for teachers, the project directors did not always receive release time, or were not always fully

compensated for extra time spent. Only 33 percent of surveyed teachers said that they received considerable release time or other positive schedule changes. Fifty-eight percent said there was little or no provision of release time for project management. According to respondents, most of the project management time was gained through after-school scheduling, use of volunteers, and education support personnel *(see Figure 12)*.

NFIE has not adequately solved the complex time problems confronting project directors. **Indeed, the time demands encountered by NFIE grantees mirror a problem faced by all teachers: the lack of sufficient time to plan, reflect, interact with colleagues and parents, and engage in professional development.**

National panels have recently studied the issue of teacher time. As the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (NECTL) stated, "The whole question of teachers and time needs to be rethought in a serious and systematic way" (NECTL 1994).

The NEA's Special Committee on Time Resources similarly concluded that time limitations are inhibiting school reform efforts and that "reconceptualization of time is an imperative for schools to restructure to better serve the needs of children." The Committee recommended providing teachers with "more development time and greater authority to use that time," including time for collaboration, dialogue, and reflection. Ideally, the Committee asserted, teachers should spend half their contract time in professional responsibilities and half in direct contact with students (NEA National Center for Innovation 1994).

Among the options identified by NEA's Special Committee for restructuring teacher time were:

- freeing teachers' time from traditional constraints by enlisting administrators to teach classes, organizing appropriate opportunities for teaching assistants to supervise classes under direct supervision of teachers, teaming teachers so that one can instruct for another, combining classes with a coordinated community event, or planning teacher-approved learning experiences outside the school;
- altering the time frame of the school calendar, school day, or teaching schedule;
- reorganizing schedules to provide collegial planning time for teachers with similar assignments;
- using faculty meetings, teacher workdays, and other scheduled meeting times more effectively; and
- buying time by hiring support staff, reducing class size, extending planning periods, and other strategies (NEA National Center for Innovation 1994).

Dropout Prevention grantees tried some of these strategies, such as using faculty meetings more effectively or revising student contact time to create regular teacher collaborative periods. The NFIE experience suggests that the ultimate answer lies in school districts organizing time (and perhaps allocating dollars) in a different way.

NFIE will continue to examine ways to influence teacher time allocation and urges other groups to do the same. Without attention to the time issue, very few teachers are likely to commit to school improvement efforts beyond brief project periods.

THE PERVASIVE PROBLEM OF CHILDREN AT RISK OF SCHOOL FAILURE

The distribution of NFIE projects signals that students at risk of school failure are a broader problem than many citizens and policy makers realize—a finding with policy implications for education reform, teacher preparation, and professional development in all states. As Carol Edwards observed, "It's the quiet problem in affluent schools or small town, middle class America."

Most of the NFIE programs were located in small towns, suburban areas, or small to medium-sized cities, areas not traditionally thought to have serious problems with school dropouts or failing students. Indeed, according to several project directors, their schools or communities were reluctant to even admit that a problem existed.

Many project communities had experienced increases in student populations that necessitated extra services or different kinds of services, such as immigrant children, limited-English-proficient children, and children from single-parent families. In addition, project schools saw increased incidences of behaviors that put students at risk of school failure, such as disruptive behavior, poor grades, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, or lack of motivation. Project districts are not unique, but rather reflect the kinds of changes occurring throughout the nation. Children at risk of school failure can be found in every kind of community.

As varied and innovative professional development strategies described in this report show, to meet the needs of a changing student population will require teachers with new kinds of preparation and professional development. The Dropout Prevention projects produced several strategies for promoting the academic success of children at risk of school failure that could be incorporated into professional development on a larger scale such as peer coaching and mentoring among experienced teachers.

VII Policy Issues Requiring Further Study

NFIE has identified several additional policy issues that warrant further research, analysis, and debate. These issues surfaced repeatedly during the implementation of the Dropout Prevention Program, but were beyond the scope of the research conducted for this report and the specific findings it elicited. In highlighting them, NFIE seeks to ensure that they are not overlooked in the current debates about school reform, content and performance standards, professional development, and teacher preparation and certification.

EXTENDING REFORMS TO ALL TEACHERS

The teachers who won Dropout Prevention grants tended to have extraordinary vision, commitment, and energy. And the students these teachers targeted had difficult problems. The question of feasibility therefore arises: How can this professional development model be extended to enable a large number of teachers to become effective with children at risk of school failure within the scope of realistic teaching and learning demands?

Is it fair or reasonable to expect all teachers to make the kinds of extra commitments that NFIE grantees devote to their projects? What support mechanisms do most

teachers need to implement strategies developed with NFIE grants? Should professional development efforts related to children at risk of school failure focus on teachers who volunteer, or on all teachers? Additional research may reveal, for example, that it is not reasonable to expect large numbers of teachers to have great success with some students without major investments, such as dramatically lower pupil-teacher ratios.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF SCHOOL FAILURE AND SCHOOL REFORM

The problems of youth dropping out could be exacerbated as states and school districts begin implementing challenging content and performance standards. **If the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* and other standards-based reforms are going to succeed, they must encompass the students with whom schools now have the least success.**

Ensuring that children at risk of school failure are not left out of school reforms—or worse yet, pushed out if they do not meet standards—will require teachers who know how to reach the most vulnerable students. To say that some students have chronic social problems that hamper their learning is no excuse. With many children, the problem is that we do not know how to teach them and are not able to anchor instruction in contexts that are meaningful and valued in their lives. For schools to move beyond giving lip service to the notion of "success for all," teachers will need new forms of professional development, including some of the strategies described in this report.

A related challenge will arise with implementation of the voluntary teacher standards being developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. **Ideally the children with the greatest educational needs should have access to the best teachers, including those who meet NBPTS standards.** There is likely to be competition for NBPTS-certified teachers, however, with the most advantaged or affluent school districts in the best position to win. If this occurs, it could polarize the teaching force and further stratify the student population. The NBPTS is aware of this concern and is working to address equity issues. Here again, there are no easy answers, and more study is required.

SCHOOL RESOURCE ISSUES

Another issue raised by the Dropout Prevention Program that goes beyond the scope of this report is how to provide adequate funding to ensure that students at risk of school failure have opportunities to learn. This report illustrates graphically how directing resources to the professional development of teachers can pay off handsomely. However, questions about additional ways to redirect existing resources to be more effective with students at risk of school failure, under what circumstances resources are truly inadequate, and how to sustain commitment to the equitable use of resources are all important policy issues that

have significantly affected teachers and students in the Dropout Prevention Program and warrant attention.

Although resource guarantees alone do not ensure effective opportunities for children to learn, sufficient resources must be present. Redirecting existing resources is part of the process, but not the only part. It is important for educators and policy makers to examine ways to develop public support for increasing resources, as appropriate.

VIII New Roles for NEA Affiliates

As part of their normal negotiation and teacher advocacy responsibilities, affiliates could address such issues as expanding the types of professional roles for teachers and the allocation of time for teachers to engage in a variety of professional roles and collegial interaction. These issues are closely linked to issues that affiliates routinely address, including working conditions, teacher duties, scheduling, compensation, and contract issues. For example, some affiliates have negotiated extra days for teacher-driven professional development.

These are areas where even small local affiliates that lack full-time staff can make a large difference. As the NEA Special Committee on Time Resources urged:

> Time must become a significant focus at the bargaining table, at legislative exchanges, at budget debates, at parent discussion groups, and at all other forums with constituencies concerned about student achievement. (NEA National Center for Innovation 1994).

Affiliates could help educate parents, administrators, school board members, business people, and other citizens about the necessity and importance of professional development. It may not be apparent to taxpayers why teachers need to spend time away from students or why they should support more "in-service." Unless a strong case is made, teachers will find that their demands for additional professional development or teacher-controlled professional development are met with skepticism. Local affiliates could spearhead a public education campaign or disseminate publications that explain why teachers need time for professional growth and updating, just as physicians or business executives do, and how this benefits children in both the short and long run.

IX Conclusion

The nine years of the NFIE Dropout Prevention Program have opened new ways of thinking about teacher professional renewal and preventing school failure. Sustained, teacher-led professional development that takes a variety of forms and that is supported appropriately by both internal and external resources uses minds well and stimulates fresh and creative ideas. Such ideas can alter the classroom experiences of students, involve parents, and increase support from the community—all elements important to achieving success in school for students at risk of school failure. The salient features of this program—rewarding teachers with vision, providing multiple support strategies, giving teachers responsibility for budget and management—lend themselves to adaptation by other professional development programs.

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XI Appendix: Information Sources

The information in this report is derived from several sources:

A. NFIE staff and consultants conducted a retrospective study of teachers' perceptions of the effects of their projects. The instrument was a written survey sent to 57 teachers who directed or were involved in Dropout Prevention projects during the years 1986 - 1991. Responses were received from 50 percent of the teachers. This survey is the source of data reported in Figures 1 through 12.

B. NFIE conducted four case studies of Dropout Prevention projects. Sites were chosen to represent diverse student populations and various levels of funding. Each site was visited by one NFIE program consultant and at least one veteran dropout project director. At each site, the researchers spent two and one-half days interviewing the project director and other teachers and staff connected with the project. Interviews focused on program history, strategies, and impact.

C. NFIE consultants interviewed several teachers who participated in the capacity-building workshop held in the spring of 1994. Interviews were recorded. The majority of the verbatim comments in this report were taken from these interviews.

D. To assess the impact of projects on students, several project directors have collected data on a range of student performance and behavioral variables. Comparisons were made between program participants and comparable groups of high-risk students who qualified but did not participate in the programs. Comparisons were made on the following variables, which research has shown are associated with improvements in school completion rates: attendance, fewer incidents of disruptive behavior, grades, standardized test scores, promotion and retention. These data were collected for both program participants and non-participants. The data presented in this report cover projects funded in both program years 1991-92 and 1992-93. During these years, each project director developed an internal assessment under the guidance of an NFIE evaluation consultant. Because of differences in evaluation strategies and data collection, the number of projects reporting information for each variable differs.

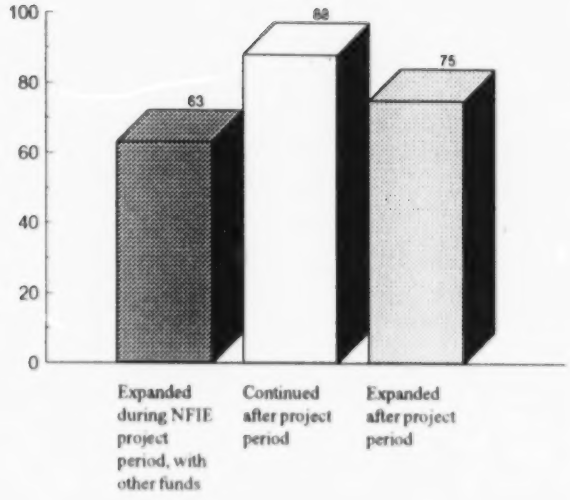

Figure One

Percentage of Project Directors Reporting:

Project Continuation and Expansion

(N = 24)

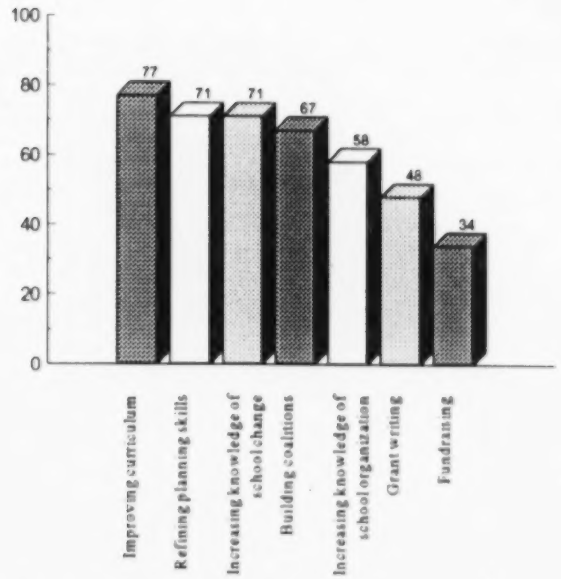

Figure Two

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable to Extensive Change in Skill Development Resulting from Grant Project Participation in Regard to . . .

(N = 43 - 45)

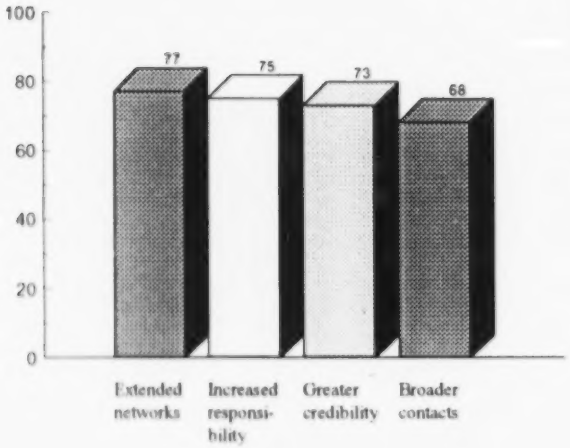

Figure Three

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable to Extensive Change in Ability to Influence Others as a Result of . . .

(N = 47 - 48)

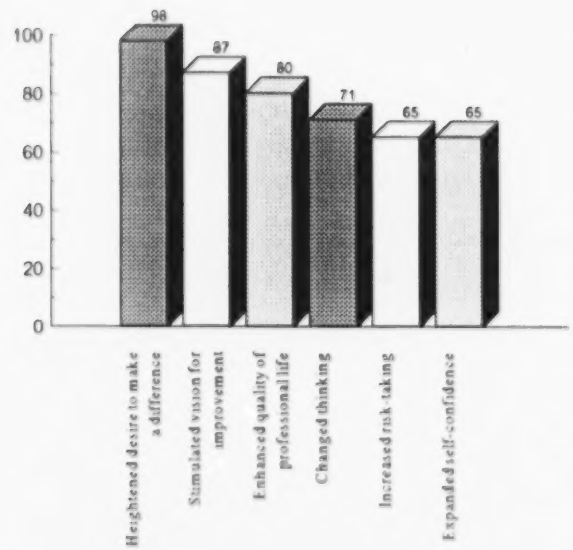

Figure Four

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable to Extensive Personal Growth Resulting from Grant Project Participation in Regard to . . .

(N = 50 - 52)

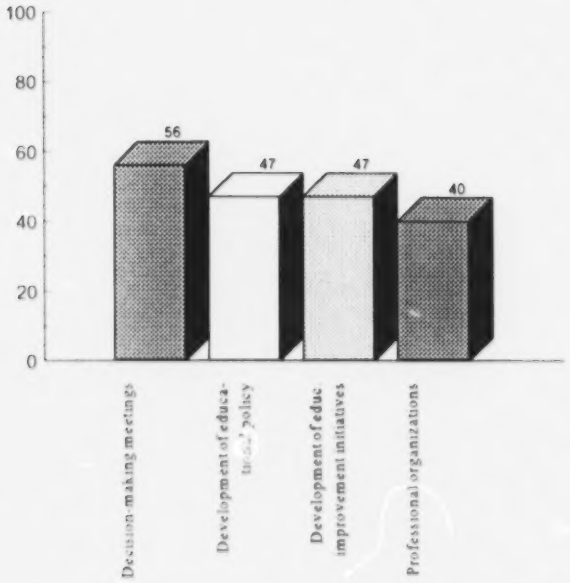

Figure Five

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable to Extensive Involvement in New Leadership Roles in . . .

(N = 43 - 45)

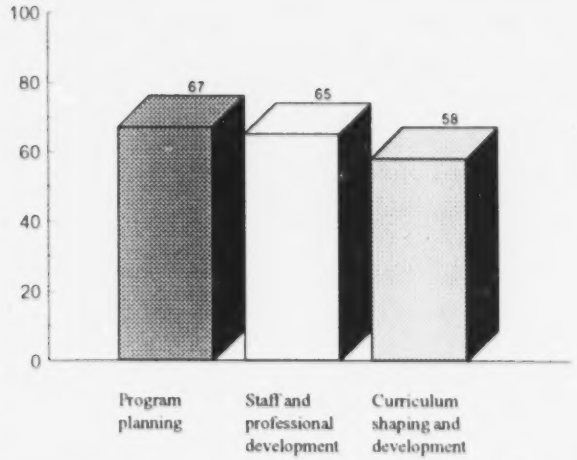

Figure Six

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable to Extensive Change in Involvement in Educational Improvement Activities such as . . .

(N = 46 - 48)

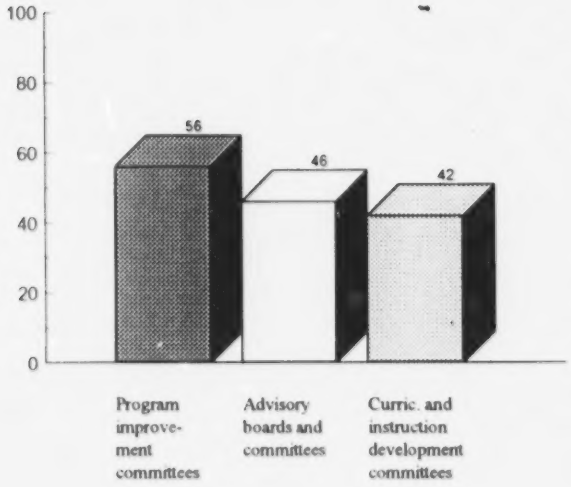

Figure Seven

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable to Extensive Change in Membership on Committees Including . . .

(N = 43 - 46)

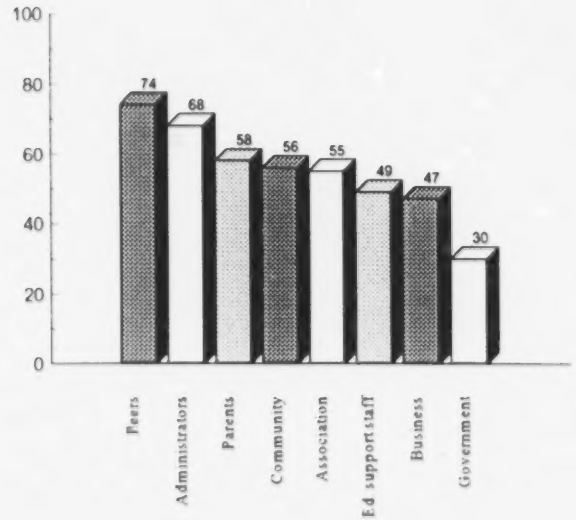

Figure Eight

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable to Extensive Increase in Interaction Resulting from Grant Project Participation, with . . .

(N = 46 - 50)

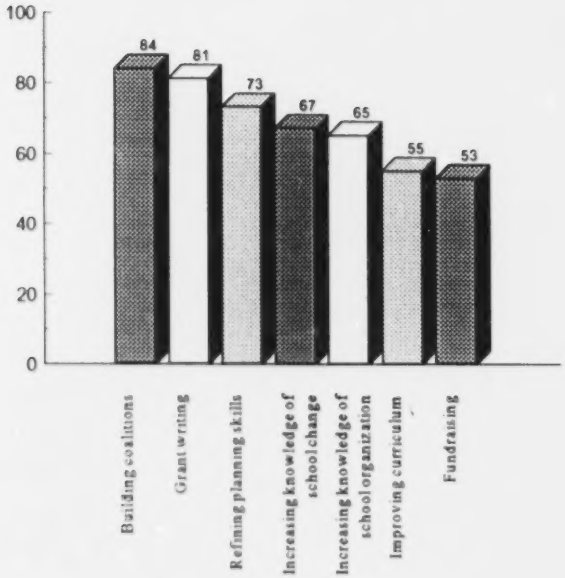

Figure Nine

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable or Extensive Importance to Effective Project Management that Skills be Developed in . . .

(N = 43 - 47)

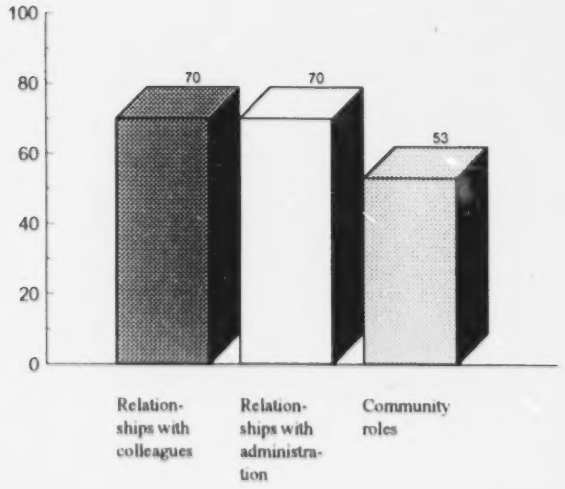

Figure Ten

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable to Extensive Change in Project Director's . . .

(N = 43 - 47)

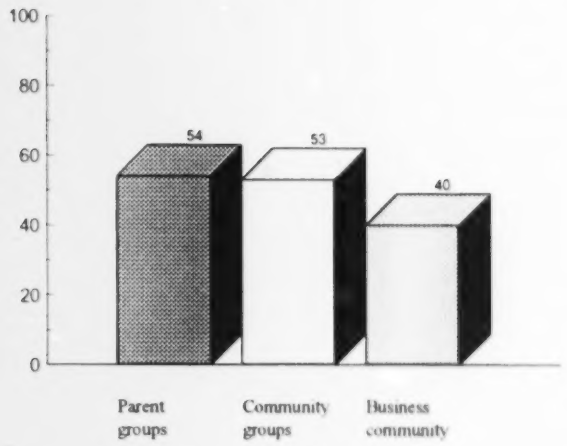

Figure Eleven

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

Considerable to Extensive Change in Speaking Engagements to . . .

(N = 45 - 48)

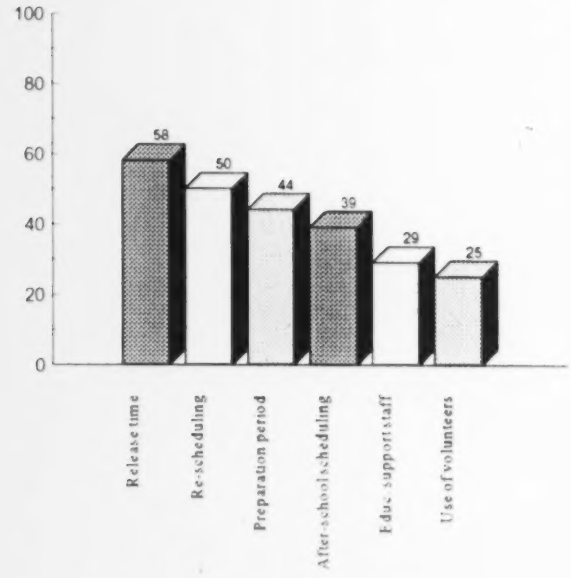

Figure Twelve

Percentage of Project Teachers Reporting:

No or Slight Provision of Time for Project Management through . . .

(N = 40 - 43)

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